

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 20, 2005

The Honorable Alberto R. Gonzales
Attorney General of the United States
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20530

Dear Attorney General Gonzales:

We write to request that the Department of Justice take immediate and aggressive action to investigate states' compliance with Section 7 of the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA). Section 7 requires all public assistance agencies, such as welfare, Medicaid, and Food Stamps offices, to promote voter registration among all applicants. A recent, comprehensive study produced by the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), Demos, and Project Vote shows virtually every state has experienced steep declines in registration from Section 7 agencies, while overall NVRA registration has increased. The nationwide drop in Section 7 registration, a good indication of states' failure to properly comply with the law, warrants a national response.

All too often, the voices of low-income, minority citizens go unheard in our democratic process. In 1993, Congress passed the NVRA with a provision intended to increase voter registration in low-income communities. The goal of the NVRA, best known for its "Motor Voter" provision, was to increase overall voter registration in the United States. Congress also included Section 7 in order to increase voter registration among low-income citizens.

On the ten-year anniversary of NVRA implementation, the new ACORN, Demos, and Project Vote study shows that nearly every state in the country is registering fewer voters through public assistance agencies than they did when the Act was first implemented, failing low-income communities and our democracy.

Lack of Section 7 implementation is reflected in the NVRA registration data reported to Congress by the Federal Election Commission and the Election Assistance Commission:

- The number of registration applications from public assistance agencies is declining. Since 1995, 36 of 41 states reporting show a decline in registration applications from public assistance agencies.
- Public assistance registrations are declining, while those from other sources are increasing. Since 1995, registration applications from public assistance agencies nationwide fell by 59.6%, while applications from all other sources rose 22%.

A chart with registration data for each state is included in the enclosed report.

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The specific NVRA violations causing the decline of Section 7 registrations vary by state:

- Some states fail to offer any voter registration services in public assistance offices. In some instances, the failure is limited to specific offices or programs within an agency and in other instances, entire agencies have no registration services.
- Some offices do offer voter registration, and do so year round, but fail to offer voter registration services during all required points of contact with clients, most notably during change of address procedures. Offices also fail to offer voter registration when clients receive service via phone, mail, or internet.
- Many jurisdictions have neglected to use the exact language required by the NVRA, which intentionally captures those who have recently changed address.
- Staff often receive little or no training about voter registration or NVRA requirements.

We call on the Department of Justice to take immediate action to enforce Section 7 of the NVRA. We are deeply troubled that despite well-documented, flagrant violations of the law, the current Department has taken little action against states to ensure compliance. The Department has yet to act on several reports provided by ACORN, Demos, and Project Vote between August 2004 and February 2005 that include specific state violations of Section 7 of the NVRA.

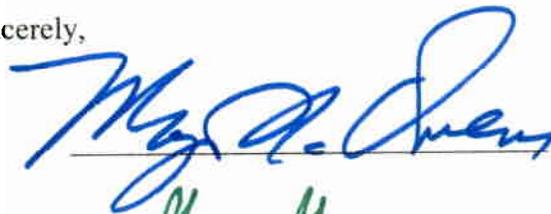
The Department of Justice must rigorously enforce the requirements imposed by the National Voter Registration Act. We look forward to your detailed response as to how the Department will fulfill that obligation in regards to Section 7 of the NVRA. Please respond to the Judiciary Committee Minority Office, 2142 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515, telephone number, 202-225-6504, fax number, 202-225-4423.

Sincerely,













Janet Skyles

Alfred Hastings

Samford Bishop

John M. Bennett

Al Green

James Moran

Al Green

Raul M. Grijalva

Emanuel Leavenworth

Bobby McCollum

Rush Holt

David Scott

Elyse E. Cummings

Eddie Bernice Johnson

Dennis J. Kucinich

Donald Mayne

Stephanie Kuehn

Robert Menendez

Paul Sarbanes

Wm. Lacy Clay

Melvin L. Watt

David Bonior

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Enclosure

cc: The Honorable William E. Moschella
Assistant Attorney General

The Honorable Bradley J. Schlozman
Acting Assistant Attorney General

Hans Van Spakovsky
Counsel to the Assistant Attorney General

Chris Herren, Trial Attorney
Voting Section, Civil Rights Division

The Honorable F. James Sensenbrenner
Chairman, Committee on the Judiciary